

Russia: Too Many U.S. Spies in Moscow



Spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova gestures as she attends a news briefing in Moscow, October 6, 2015.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia said on Friday that too many American spies operated in Moscow under diplomatic cover and said it might expel some of them to retaliate against the United States over Washington's expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats last year.

The warning, delivered by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova,

reflects rising frustration in Moscow over the Trump administration's refusal to hand back two Russian diplomatic compounds which were seized at the same time as some of Russia's diplomats were sent home last year.

Barack Obama, U.S. president at the time, ordered the expulsion of 35 suspected Russian spies in December, along with the

seizure of the two diplomatic compounds, over what he said was the hacking of U.S. political groups during the 2016 presidential election, something Russia has flatly denied.

President Vladimir Putin decided not to retaliate immediately at the time, saying he would wait to see what the new administration of Donald Trump would do.

Zakharova complained on Friday that U.S. officials were not issuing visas to Russian diplomats to allow Moscow to replace the expelled employees and get its embassy back up to full strength.

"We have a way of responding," she told a news briefing. "The number of staff at the U.S. embassy in Moscow exceeds the number of our embassy employees in Washington by a big margin. One of our options, apart from a tit-for-tat expulsion of Americans, would be to even out the numbers."

If there was no movement in the U.S.-Russia dispute soon, she said Moscow would have to reluctantly retaliate and suggested U.S. spies working in Russia would be among those to be expelled.

"There are too many employees of the CIA and the Pentagon's espionage unit working under the roof of the American diplomatic mission whose activity does not correspond at all with their status," said Zakharova.

Russia would also move to deny U.S. diplomats use of a dacha compound and a warehouse in Moscow, she made clear.

North Korea Vows 'Corresponding Measures' to Sanctions

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korea said on Friday it will take "corresponding measures" if the UN Security Council adopts another sanctions resolution in response to the North's test-launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) last week.

The North's foreign ministry said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency that the ICBM test was an exercise of its legitimate right to self-defense against nuclear threat from the United States.

The United States has been trying to get China and Russia to back a new UN Security Council resolution imposing stiffer sanctions on North Korea following its latest missile test.

Two senior U.S. officials said Thursday the Trump administration could impose new sanctions on Chinese banks and other firms doing business with Pyongyang within weeks.

The Chinese customs department released figures that showed significant growth in overall bilateral trade in the first six months of the year.

President Donald Trump and his top aides have signaled growing impatience with China over North Korea, especially since it last week test-launched its first intercontinental ballistic missile, which experts say could put all of Alaska in range for the first time.

U.S. officials have also warned China could face U.S. trade and economic pressure — something Trump has held in abeyance since taking office in January — unless it does more to restrain its neighbor.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un reacts with scientists and technicians of the DPRK Academy of Defense Science after the test-launch of the intercontinental ballistic missile Hwasong-14 in Pyongyang July 5, 2017.

spokesman Geng Shuang reiterated China's opposition to unilateral sanctions outside the framework of the UN and said China had been fully enforcing UN resolutions.

Getting China's help on passing UN resolutions and then putting unilateral sanctions on China was like "abandoning one's benefactor upon achieving one's goal", Geng added.

The threat of further secondary sanctions on Chinese companies could complicate next

week's U.S.-China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, an important forum for narrowing differences between the world's two biggest economies.

A 29% spike in Chinese exports to North Korea -- North Korea bought \$1.67 billion worth of Chinese products in the first six months of the year — helped push total trade between the two countries up 10 percent between January and June, compared with the same period last year.

Report: 2016, Deadliest Year for Environmentalists



Mining, oil, agriculture and logging were the industries most associated with activist murders.

NEW DELHI (AP) — At least 200 land and environmental activists were slain in 2016 protecting forests, rivers and land from mining, logging and agricultural companies, the highest annual number on record, a watchdog group said Thursday.

India had a threefold increase in such killings but Latin America remained the deadliest region with some 60% of the world's deaths of activists protecting local resources, London-based Global Witness said in a report. The deaths, which rose from 185 the previous year, were reported in 24 countries compared to 16 in 2015.

"The fact that the upward curve of killings has continued ... suggests that governments and business continue to prioritize short-term profit over human lives," Global Witness campaigner Billy Kyte told The Associated Press.

Mining, oil, agriculture and logging were the industries most associated with activist murders. Kyte said such interests are encroaching more on previously untouched areas and coming into conflict in particular with indigenous peoples, who accounted for 40% of the victims documented in the report.

The group said the true number of killings is likely to be much higher, since collecting such data is difficult. And while murder is an extreme tactic of oppression, activists also routinely experienced death threats, assaults, arrests and costly legal battles, it said.

Honduras, where 14 land defenders were killed last year, remained the deadliest nation per capita.

The non-governmental Pastoral Land Commission, which tracks land conflicts in Brazil, blamed the high level of violence on agriculture, mining, energy and other companies moving into lands held by traditional and indigenous communities.

The commission itself registered 61 deaths in land conflicts in 2016, the highest figure in 13 years.

The Global Witness report listed 37 deaths in Colombia, followed by the Philippines and India with 28 and 16, respectively. The report noted police brutality against largely peaceful protests soared in India in 2016.

Across Africa the people most at risk were rangers at national parks whose jobs pitted them against poachers.

China: Taiwan President's Behavior 'Very Dangerous'

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China on Friday warned Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, saying her remarks about the death of a Nobel Peace laureate were "very dangerous" for cross-strait relations.

Beijing's reaction came a day after Tsai said the self-ruled island hoped China could promote political reform after Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo died of cancer.

Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, accused Tsai of aggravating cross-strait tensions, saying her remarks were an example of "repeated arbitrary attacks".

Such "reckless" comments are "very dangerous" for cross-strait relations, the official Xinhua news agency quoted the spokesman as saying.

Beijing also lodged official protests with the U.S., France, Germany and the UN human rights office over their "irresponsible remarks" regarding Liu Xiaobo.

The state-controlled Global Times newspaper said in an English-language editorial that "the West has bestowed upon Liu a halo, which will not linger".

The U.S. and the EU paid tribute to Liu Xiaobo, while Germany voiced regret that Beijing ignored its offer to host him, with French President Emmanuel Macron describing him a "freedom fighter".

Britain accused China of preventing Liu from travelling overseas for treatment. The UN human rights commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said Liu "was jailed for standing up for his beliefs".

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Liu's Nobel status was "a blasphemy of the peace prize".

"Conferring the prize to such a person goes against the purposes of this award," he said.

Liu lost his battle with liver cancer on Thursday at age 61, more than a month after he was transferred from prison to a hospital in the northeastern city of Shenyang.

He was sentenced to 11 years in prison in 2008 for "subversion" over his role in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

A day after Liu's death, attention turned to his widow who is also in prison. The Foreign Ministry spokesman said he would "not make prejudgments" about whether Liu Xia could go abroad.

In Taiwan, lawmakers on Friday engaged in a physical fight at the parliament for a second consecutive day over a controversial government-proposed infrastructure project.

Legislators from the president's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and critics from the opposition Kuomintang Party wielded chairs above their heads and throwing water balloons as they brawled over the major project.



PARIS (Reuters) -- President Emmanuel Macron pledged on Thursday to start increasing French military spending from next year in order to reach a target of two percent of economic output by 2025, despite budgetary constraints.

Macron and his government have trimmed the 2017 defense budget in an effort to ensure France meets its commitment to bring its budget deficit below the EU cap of three percent of national income in 2017. He said 2018 would mark the start of a new phase of increased defence spending. France's defence spending will reach 34.2 billion euros (\$38.98 billion) in 2018, including 650 million for external operations, Macron said.

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) -- A Serbian appeals court on Thursday halted a landmark trial against eight former Bosnian Serb police officers charged with taking part in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre — another legal hurdle in the Balkan state's struggle to come to terms with its wartime past.

The trial that started in December was the first time that a Serbian court has dealt with the killings by Bosnian Serb troops of around 8,000 Muslim men and boys in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica. It was Europe's worst single atrocity since World War II. The proceedings were seen as a test of Serbia's pledge to deal with its wartime past as it formally wants to join the European Union — and as an important step in Balkan reconciliation efforts more than two decades after the Bosnian war ended.

SYDNEY (Reuters) -- Australia on Friday proposed new laws to compel companies such as U.S. social media giant Facebook and device manufacturer Apple to provide security agencies access to encrypted messages.

The measures will be the first in an expected wave of global legislation as pressure mounts on technology companies to provide such access after several terror suspects used encrypted applications ahead of attacks. Australia, a staunch U.S. ally, is on heightened alert for attacks by home-grown radicals since 2014 and authorities have said they have thwarted several plots, although Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said law enforcement needed more help. While Australia is poised to become the first country to adopt laws on encrypted messages, other nations have said they will introduce similar laws.

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) -- Torrential rains, floods and landslides in northeastern India have left at least 83 people dead in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur.

Authorities told Reuters that a whopping two million people had been displaced. "Assam is the worst hit with 53 lives lost so far in floods and landslides with some 2 million people displaced," Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Friday. "Relief and rescue operations are going on a war footing," he said. The overflowing Brahmaputra River has also completely marooned the Kaziranga wildlife sanctuary in Assam, forcing animals to flee the area.

MOSCOW (TASS) -- More than 3,000 Russian and Tajik military are taking part in the first joint snap combat readiness check that began in the Central Asian republic on Friday, Assistant Commander of Russia's Central Military District, Colonel Yaroslav Roshchupkin, said.

"The military of Russia and Tajikistan are participating jointly for the first time in a snap readiness check. The servicemen of the two armies backed by Russian operational-tactical and army aviation are performing training and combat tasks in line with a single plan in a common operation situation on the mountainous firing grounds of Lyaur and Kharbmaydon," he said.

LIMA (Reuters) -- Peru's former President Ollanta Humala and his wife turned themselves in to authorities late Thursday after a judge ordered them to spend up to 18 months in jail while prosecutors prepare charges against them for alleged money laundering.

The ruling by Judge Richard Concepcion, which triggered jeers from the couple's supporters during a public hearing that stretched over two days, marked the second time he has mandated jail time for an ex-president since a massive graft scandal in neighboring Brazil rippled into Peru.

Japanese Protest Outside U.S. Base in Okinawa

TOKYO (Dispatches) -- Japanese protesters have held a rally in front of the American Camp Schwab marine corps camp on the island of Okinawa in protest at a planned relocation of yet another U.S. military facility to the area.

Demonstrators lined the road leading to the marine base in Henoko area near Nago City on Thursday, chanting slogans against the plans and holding placards decrying the U.S. military presence. "Marines out!" and "Stop illegal work," the placards read.

According to the relocation plan, an air base will be built in the waters off the coast from Camp Schwab over the next five years as part of the relocation of the Futenma Air Station to the Henoko area.

Local residents and Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga have continued to express their opposition since the plan was announced.

On Tuesday, Okinawa Prefectural Assembly committee passed a resolution, demanding legal action against the base's relocation. The entire assembly is expected to vote on the issue on Friday, laying the groundwork for legal action against the Japanese government for pushing through the project.

Nearly half of 100,000 U.S. troops in Okinawa reside in Okinawa which has become known as a source of enduring concern for the Japanese people.

Pacifist inclinations as well as security and safety concerns have prompted the Japanese to protest against the U.S. military presence in Japan from time to time.

Multiple cases of misconduct by U.S. forces have also raised anti-American sentiment among the islanders.

In April 2016, a U.S. Marine murdered Rina Shimabukuro in Okinawa. The 20-year-old victim,



People raise their fists as they shout slogans to protest against the U.S. military presence in front of the U.S. Kadena Air Base in Cyatan, Okinawa prefecture, on May 21, 2016.

who worked at the base, was raped, struck in the head, and stabbed on her way back home.

Back in 2013, two American sailors admitted to raping another woman in Okinawa in the previous year in a case that sparked massive protests.

In 1995, the abduction and rape of a 12-year-old girl by three U.S. servicemen also triggered huge protests, prompting Washington to pledge efforts to strengthen troop discipline to prevent such crimes and reduce U.S. footprint on the island.